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SERMON CCVI.

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THE RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE OF MOTHERS:

2 KINGS 4 : 19. *Carry him to his mother.*

THE text is taken from a story of much tenderness and beauty. In the various journeys which Elisha made from Carmel to Samaria, he frequently passed through Shunam, where lived a woman well known for her piety and her rank, among the inhabitants of the place. Seeing how frequently the "holy man of God passed by," she proposed to her husband to have a chamber suitably furnished for his accommodation: "and it shall be," she added, "when he comes, he will turn in hither." The prophet was pleased with this exercise of piety and generosity on his behalf, and when "he came thither, he turned into the chamber and lay there." But if he was pleased, he wished also to manifest his gratitude; and he sent to her, saying, "Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?" Promotion at court, however, was not her ambition. She was loved and respected where she was; and she answered, "I dwell among mine own people."

There was one point, however, on which her feelings were deeply interested. She was childless; had no son or daughter on whom to exercise her affections, and to whom she might impart the influence of her good example, and her distinguished name. And in the way most welcome of all others, we find she had her recompense for the kindness shown to the man of God. Elisha predicts to her the birth of a son, and in due time she becomes the happy mother of a child, the more beloved, no doubt, for his having been given to her with such marks of Heaven's favor.

But how soon may the choicest comforts become sources of bitterest sorrows! "When the child was grown," grown, too, it would appear, to that age of childhood, most interesting to parents, "it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers." While in the field, he is suddenly taken ill, exclaiming to his father, "My head, my head!" who immediately directed one of the lads to "carry him to his mother."

It was the best plan for the child; and, if there was hope for him at all,
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there he would find it. But, though carried to her without delay, and from the hour he was brought to her, not once removed from her eye, when "he had sat on her knees till noon, he then died." Overpowered as she must have been for the moment by this sudden calamity—her child of promise and of prayer, well in the morning, and a corpse on her lap at noon—yet not a murmur escaped from her; and she began at once to act like one whose mind was more fixed on the resuscitation of her child, than on its burial. "She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God," and then hasted away to Carmel, to lay her sorrow before the prophet, saying to her servant, "Drive, and go forward, slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee." She was seen by Elisha, while yet "afar off;" and his anxiety being awakened by her eager haste, he commands his servant to "run and meet her, and to say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?" Feeling, as she did, that whatever God does, is well done, she answered, "It is well;" and rushing past the servant, she threw herself in the bitterness of her soul at the feet of "the man of God." There she presented her case, and refused to leave him, till he would go with her to the chamber where the child "was laid upon his bed." He went, therefore, and having entered, and "shut the door upon them twain," he "prayed unto the Lord." In answer to his prayer, accompanied by action significant of his earnest engagedness, the "flesh of the child waxed warm," it "opened its eyes," and its heart again began to beat with the pulsation of life. The anxious mother was then called, and directed to "take up her son," now no longer a cold corpse, but animated with all the freshness of former days. Her joy, as she looked upon him thus restored to life and to her, did not lead her to forget her Maker and his; and, accordingly, first owning the Divine goodness and power to which she was indebted for her child, she "bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son and went out."

The narrative does not tell us how the child grew from this time forth, and what he became in after life. It leaves this to be inferred from the character of the mother, to whose hands his childhood was committed. The silence of the Scriptures is often as full of meaning as its express declarations; and if we are not expressly told in the story before us, yet we are led to believe, that, childhood being spent beneath such a mother's care, manhood must have ripened in piety and usefulness, perhaps in brilliant fame, and death have been met in peace. And here you have the object of our present discourse. It is to show,

How much the future happiness and welfare of children, both in this world and the world to come, must depend on the piety and faithfulness of mothers. Or, in allusion to the history from which our text is taken, it is to show,

That it depends, under God, on the mother's pious care over those in childhood, how far they are to pass unharmed at last, through the ills of life, and whether they shall be found, in the end, quickened from death in trespasses and sins, and heirs according to the hope of life everlasting. "As is the mother, so is the daughter," saith the proverb of the ancients; and

equally true is it, in the sense we have described, that "as is the mother, so is the son." Let us consider,

1. How facts bear on the illustration of the truth now advanced. We have read history to little purpose, if we have not observed, that there are periods when corruption seems to acquire a peculiar and fearful sway in our world; and these sad changes are generally attributed to the influence of some distinguished leader, or leaders in wickedness, who impress their own corrupt image on the generation in which they live. But if we trace the evils to their true source, we must go farther back than to the men who stand thus prominent in producing them. Had I time, I would here show, that all those great changes from bad to worse, which have rendered nations so corrupt as to consign them to ruin, have been effected through the corrupting influence of mothers, acting on those in childhood, who, in manhood, became the leading men of their day. Such, the Holy Scriptures inform us, was the real cause of that awful wickedness which brought the waters of the deluge on the earth. It was not till "the sons of God took to them wives of the daughters of men," (thus contracting unhallowed and forbidden alliances,) that "the wickedness of man became so great in the earth that it repented the Lord that he had made man, and he said, I will destroy man which I created, from the face of the earth." And what is so marked as the immediate cause of the wide spread depravity which called for the destruction of a world, is equally marked in other parts of the Scriptures, as the grand source of ruin to the nations whose history they record. Have you never observed how frequently they allude to the mothers of Israel, and of Judah's kings, when in the days of the nation's decline the throne passed in such rapid succession from one king to another, "who did evil in the sight of the Lord?" The career of guilt and declension was sometimes checked by the raising up of one good king, who walked in the way of the Lord. Such was Josiah, of whom we are told, "his mother's name was Jedediah;"—a name which at once announces her piety and worth. But see how the parentage of the wicked and idolatrous kings is noted. We are told of Abijah, the grandson of Solomon, and who was, perhaps, the first who filled the land with idolatry, that his mother's name was Maachah. Of Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, who did evil exceedingly in the sight of the Lord, we are told that his mother was Jezebel, who stirred up his father Ahab to sin. In like manner we are told of Jehoahaz, that his mother's name was Hamutal; of Jehoikim, that his mother's name was Zebadah; of Jehoiachin, that his mother's name was Nehushta:—names which, taken in connection with their history, sufficiently show the evil courses they pursued, and the consequent evil influence they would exert.

Now, why was this all so carefully noted? It was to show that the bane of the nation was found in the nurseries of her kings, where their infant minds were tainted and poisoned by their Jezebel mothers; and that being thus early led into sin, when in after life they gained the throne, their baleful influence was felt in spreading wickedness around them, till their nation was carried away into captivity, and their land left a desolation. It was the corrupt queen-mothers, corrupting the minds of their infant sons, who were to be, in future,

kings, that primarily and mainly drew down the anger of God; nor was it till this insidious source of evil had been for generations at work, that hope finally perished.

But if maternal influence is thus powerful for evil, it is equally powerful for good, when rightly and wisely employed. Nor do I believe the assertion at all too strong, when I say, that the greatest and best of those whom we count among the great and good of our race, have always derived the elements of their characters from maternal care bestowed on them in childhood. If, in all the annals of the human race, there be an exception to our position, let it be named; let us be told where it is. It cannot be found in the pages of sacred history. The testimony here, respecting those whose names it has embalmed for immortality, is all one way. Such, it tells us, was the training under which the childhood of Moses was passed. The faith and piety of his mother were so strong, that "she did not fear the king's wrath;" thus showing herself a fit mother for a son who was to be the deliverer of Israel from Egyptian bondage, and the lawgiver to the redeemed nation. And who does not see the hand and design of God in that wonderful train of events which secured to the child of such high destiny, the care of a mother so peculiarly fitted for her task.

Under a like happy influence was the childhood of David passed; as he acknowledges in his subsequent days of power and fame. "Oh, Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the *son of thine handmaid*; thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and will call on the name of the Lord:"—thus in the days of his highest prosperity and greatest fame, recognising his pious mother's influence, not only as having mainly contributed to elevate him to Israel's throne, but as having been the bright star which kept alive his hope, in the darkest hour of his previous troubles.

To the same cause, as already observed in the case of Josiah, are we taught to attribute, in great measure, the wisdom and power which distinguished such of Judah's kings as "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord."

Again: John, the forerunner of our Saviour, is said to have had none greater than himself of all who had been born of women. But his mother was *Elizabeth*, a woman who "walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."

Again: among the apostles of our Lord was one distinguished as "a son of thunder;" and another privileged to "lean on his Master's bosom," and to receive very special tokens of his love. But when we are told of the piety and holy ambition of *their mother*, we may account, at least in part, for their distinction among the twelve. (Matt. 20: 20, 21.) And not to mention others from the sacred Scriptures, as Timothy, whose "unfeigned faith dwelt first in his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice;" who, let me ask with reverence, was the mother of our Lord and Saviour himself? It was *Mary*, to whom the salutation from heaven was given—"Hail, highly favored; *the Lord is with thee.*" Thus showing, in the most illustrious of all examples, that

whatever is expected to ripen into true greatness, and perfection, must be first nurtured under a mother's piety, and wisdom, and faithfulness.

And on whom has the Saviour's mantle ever fallen, or in whom has his Spirit ever dwelt, with peculiar manifestation, who may not be added to the cloud of witnesses on this point? In far-gone times, look into the biographies of Polycarp, Augustine, Justin, Gregory, and others of the Fathers; and in later days, look to the childhood of our own Edwards, Dwight, Payson, Mills, and the whole army of those, at home and abroad, who are this day owned and hailed as the champions of truth, and you will find them all, without exception, to have been the sons of pious and faithful mothers. Nor is it only from the great and illustrious in the church, that we may collect such facts. Look around you and see; what are the families from which religion derives its most devoted and faithful friends? From what dwellings come the sacramental hosts, who fill the Lord's table when it is spread, and not only there confess his name before men, but are the foremost in efforts to spread his name through the world? Do they come from families where the mother, though she may rule as a queen of fashion, and is perhaps rich in every worldly endowment, yet loves not God, and finds no place for him in her heart and her labors? Far from it. They come, and come almost exclusively, from households where the mother is a Christian; where the nursery of the family is a nursery for the church; where the first lisps of childhood, are accents of prayer; and the first thoughts of the heart, thoughts of God and of his Christ.

Nor need I stop here; had I time to go farther, I might add to the history of the church, the history of civil communities and nations. I might ask, who are your most valued merchants? who your wisest counsellors and legislators? You will find in most, if not in all instances, that the elements of their wisdom and greatness were formed under the hand of maternal care and wisdom. The father of our country, Washington, felt that he owed to his mother much of what placed him so high, both in the cabinet and the field. Napoleon, in the zenith of his glory, is said often to have owned how much of what was brilliant in his character, he derived from his mother. What else but a testimony to the same truth is given from the established law of certain tribes in our western wilds, ordaining that the sceptre shall descend through the mother, and not through the father? With such evidence, then, furnished from the records of all time, whether written "by saint, by savage, or by sage," I believe the world will never have a different testimony to give, as to the *fact* of the paramount influence of mothers.

Let us now consider, in the second place, that what facts show has been, reason shows must be, on this important subject.

"Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined."

But who bends the twig? Who has the mind or character in hand, while it is yet so flexible and ductile, that it can be turned in any direction, or formed into any shape? It is the mother. From her own nature, and the nature of her child, it results that its first impressions must be taken from her. And she has every advantage for discharging the duty. She is always with her child—if she is where mothers ought to be; sees continually

the workings of its faculties; where they most need to be restrained, and where led and attracted. Early as she may begin her task, let her be assured, that her labor will not be lost because undertaken too soon. Mind, from the first hour of its existence, is ever acting; and soon may a mother see, that, carefully as she may study her child, quite as carefully is her child studying her. Let her watch the varying expression of its speaking face, as its eyes follow her, and she will perceive its mind is imbibing impressions from every thing it sees her do; and thus showing, that, before the lips have begun to utter words, the mind has begun to act, and to form a character. Let her watch on; and when, under her care, the expanding faculties have begun to display themselves in the sportiveness of play, how often will she be surprised to find the elements of character already fixed, when she has least expected it. She has but to watch, and she will find the embryo tyrant or philanthropist, warrior or peace-maker, with her in her nursery: and then, if ever, her constant prayer should be, "How shall I order the child, and what shall I do unto him?" for, what he is to be, and what he is to do, in any of these characters, she must now decide. It is a law of our being that makes it so; a law that I could wish were written on every mother's heart, by the finger of God, and on the walls of her nursery, in letters of gold, that the mind of childhood is like wax to receive, but like marble to hold, every impression made upon it, be it for good or for evil. Let her then improve her power as she ought, "being steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work" which God requires at her hands; and let her know that her labor is not in vain in the Lord. For, even though her own eyes may not be privileged to witness in her child all that is noble, and great, and good, she may at least have lodged within him a charm against evil, that may save him, when her course on earth is finished. It is no picture of the imagination, that I hold out, when I ask you to come and see the son of a faithful mother, who has long pursued his course of crime, till he seems hardened against every thing good or true; yea, at times "sits in the seat of the scorner," and scoffs at every thing holy and good,—but yet, hardened and dead as his heart may seem, as to every thing else you may urge, there is one point on which, till his dying day, he can be made to feel. You touch it, when you remind him of what he saw and felt, when a child, under the care of a tender mother. His sensibilities there, he never utterly loses; and often, often, by that, as the last cord which holds him from utter perdition, is the prodigal drawn back and restored; so that, though "dead, he is alive again," though once "lost, he is found."

Such are some of the illustrations of a mother's power to do good to those most dear to her, and of the responsibility that springs from it. There is no influence so powerful as hers on the coming destinies of the church and the world. She acts a part in forming the ministers of religion, and the rulers of the land, without which all subsequent training is comparatively vain. And to her, also, it falls to train those who are to be mothers when she is gone, and to do for their generation, what she has done for hers.

In closing this important subject, then, we are led to reflect,

1. As to mothers themselves:—what a spirit of humility and dependence

on God should they cherish, in view of their station and duties in the world! Not more fitting to the minister at the altar, than to the mother in her family, is the exclamation, "Who is sufficient for these things?" What earnestness in prayer, too, and what persevering watchfulness should accompany this sense of dependence on divine grace! When I see Hannah, the mother of Samuel, "pouring out her soul before the Lord," and not only "praying for her child," with all the earnestness she could feel, but "continuing in prayer," as one who will not be denied, I see what her son is likely to be. His future greatness and worth may be dated from that hour. Let Christian mothers remember that prayer is as powerful now, as it was then.

And, if they would not "hinder their own prayers," let them see to it that they walk circumspectly before their children, and their conduct be as becometh the Gospel of Christ. It was a maxim among the Romans, "Great deference and respect are due to the young." We all feel that this is due to the aged. But if parents show it uniformly to their children, they may be sure of having it well repaid to them. In the first morning of life, not only is precept nothing, without example, but example is every thing; it is the only source of knowledge from which the infant can learn.

2. I have a word to fathers who are blessed, with such mothers to their children as I have described. There are fathers, I know, who, so far from prizing and seconding a mother's labors, as they ought, would rather thwart and defeat them; and through their unnatural and poisoning influence, has the seed, which was sown and watered by a mother's prayers and tears, been sometimes blasted, if not destroyed. Better for such a man that he had never been born. For if there be a cavern in hell, more dark and dreadful than any other, it must be the spot where such a father meets the son whom he has allured to perdition from the embrace of a pious mother. But let me hope there is no such monster of cruelty within these walls. I feel assured, that every father before me would rejoice to witness the mild dominion of piety and truth over his infant sons and daughters, as exerted by a mother's faithfulness. But while you would love and cherish her to whom you owe so much, be careful and prompt to sustain her in those labors of love, on which so much of your children's welfare depends. Her heart is sustained, and strengthened in the discharge of maternal duty, by even the smile of an approving husband. What animation and courage, then, must be given her, when she finds herself possessed of his sympathies, co-operation, and prayers, on her behalf!

Finally: I would remind all, whether young or old, of the honor and respect due to every mother who is doing her duty faithfully. The church and the world owe her a debt of gratitude, which they are too little inclined to appreciate fully. And here, perhaps, is a duty in which Christian communities may learn something from a heathen nation. In the days of Rome's greatest splendor, there stood on one of her seven hills, a temple dedicated to "Female Fortune;" and over its magnificent portal was written the name of Volumnia; for whose honor the temple had been built, to perpetuate her memory as a matron who had saved Rome by her influence over her son. Not far distant from it, arose a column, on which was inscribed "Cornelia, the

Mother of the Gracchi;" in acknowledgment of her worth, as the mother of two sons, whom she had trained up to be the ornaments and defenders of her nation. Such was the respect paid to mothers who "acted well their part" in pagan Rome. And will not Christian communities ever delight to "honor those whom God so greatly honors," by committing to their hands what is most precious in the happiness of all coming generations? They surely will. And let every mother bear in mind, that she may here obtain for herself a memorial far more enduring and precious, than the richest temple or column which Rome ever saw; and a still more enduring memorial in heaven, where, with her sons and daughters around her, her crown gathering brightness from theirs, she may bow before the throne of God and the Lamb, and proclaim to his praise—*Behold here am I, and the children thou hast given me!*

SERMON CCVII.

By JAMES M. MATHEWS, D. D.

THE ADORABLE SAVIOUR.

JOHN IX: 38—*And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.*

HEB. 1: 6—*When he bringeth the First-begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God worship him.*

THE sum of the gospel is the Saviour:—the Saviour in the fullness of his grace, and the perfection of his glories. The richest gems it contains were designed to adorn and beautify for ever the crown he wears. And if we love Him, we shall love, also, to gather them up again and again, and plant them anew on his brow, in order to gain fresh views of his divine beauty and excellence. That He is God, absolutely, essentially, and supremely God, we fully believe; and in this belief is our chief joy. Were it gone, our hope in his name would have no strength left as an "anchor of the soul;" and we could not sing the song in which so many have chanted their way to heaven: "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid; for Jehovah, Jehovah is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation."

Of course, in every fresh confirmation of his Divinity, which we gain, we add fresh strength to our joy and hope. Hence, the subject is ever welcome to the Christian; and you will, no doubt, my hearers, gladly accompany me, in surveying that strong and unanswerable argument for his Godhead, furnished in the text. I mean,

THE WORSHIP, which the Scriptures uniformly describe as his due, and uniformly describe as paid to Him by all ranks of intelligent creatures. While we glance at this subject, may He whose honor we would vindicate, enable us rightly to understand and improve it.

It is an axiom in theology, and needs no proof, that worship should be rendered to none but God; and that none can rightfully receive it, but He who knows himself to be God. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God; and Him *only* shalt thou serve," is a dictate of reason, as well as of revelation. If, then, we find the Scriptures constantly holding up the Saviour as a being who *is to be worshipped*, and who *always has been worshipped* by men and angels best acquainted with his character, what follows—what must follow, but that Christ is recognised in the Scriptures as Divine?

Now, what are the facts in the case? How was he regarded when on earth, by those who best knew his character, and best knew the will of Heaven concerning the measure of honor he should receive? "We have seen his star in the East, and have *come to worship Him*," said the wise men, who had been conducted by divine guidance from a far country, to render him their homage, while he was a babe in the manger:—and what they had come to do, they did. "When they saw the young child, they fell down, and *worshipped Him*; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts—gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

When he had finished his sermon on the mount, and was come down, "behold there came a leper and *worshipped him*, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." And was he reproved by the Saviour, for thus paying him divine honors? So far from it, that immediately "Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, *I will; be thou clean*. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed."

On another occasion, he cured a man that was born blind; and when he afterwards found him, he asked, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" And when he that was once blind, asked, "Who is he, Lord, that I *might* believe on him?" and was answered, "Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee," he said, "Lord, I believe; and he *worshipped Him*."

A woman of Canaan, whose daughter was grievously vexed with a devil, "came and *worshipped him*, saying, Lord, help me;" and he requited her faith and her worship, by granting her request.

When Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were told he had risen from the dead, and were hastening away to tell his disciples, they were met by Jesus himself; "and they came and held him by the feet, and *worshipped Him*." And again, when the eleven disciples saw Him, "they *worshipped Him*."

Such was the service which his followers rendered him, while on earth. So universally did they *worship him*; believing that thus they but performed their duty; and as universally did he accept of their worship, as rightfully his due, and well-pleasing in his sight.

I might show you, also, that others besides his followers on earth, worship him. I might recur to the words of Paul, which he recites from the Psalmist: "When he bringeth his First-begotten into the world, he saith, Let all the angels of God *worship him*." And I might draw aside the curtain of heaven, and say with the beloved John, in the Apocalypse, "I beheld, and they fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints; and they sung a new song, saying,

Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Nor does the vision end here.—"And I beheld, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying, with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." Where, I would ask, is that creature in all the universe of God, which is not described as speaking and acting here? And in what service is it, that all unite? What holy purpose, what sacred duty is it, that can thus engage every creature in all worlds, around, above, and below, in such a sympathy and concert as we here witness? It is the worship of Jesus. The Lamb that was slain is thus recognised as meriting and receiving divine homage and praise, from all creatures that are able to give it.

But while Christ thus freely and invariably accepts the expressions of homage from all creatures; and thus, as we say, avows himself to be "God over all, blessed for ever," our argument may be strengthened by showing,

2. How invariably angels and holy men have refused worship, when offered to them:—men refusing it, on the ground that they were men, and not God; thus showing that worship should be rendered to God alone, and that God alone could receive it; and angels also refusing it on the same principle.

When Cornelius, the centurion, had been directed by an angel of God to send for Peter, who should "tell him what he ought to do," "as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and *worshipped* him;" just as the apostle had seen men honor his Saviour, in the instances we have adduced. But what does Peter do and say? Does he receive the worship thus proffered to him? No! "Peter took him by the hand, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man."

When at Lystra, Paul healed a man impotent in his feet, a cripple from his birth; and when the people, seeing what he had done, "lifted up their voices, saying, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men;" and when "the priest brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people;" how did the apostles act? Did they suffer the proposed worship and homage to be rendered to them? Shocked at the very idea, "they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein."

Equally prompt and decided are *angels* in refusing worship, when it has been tendered to them. When John, in the view given him of the heavenly world, was so overpowered with its glories, as set before him by the angel who talked with him, that he "fell at the angel's feet to worship him,"—what

was the reply from that bright and sinless messenger of heaven? High and exalted as he was, he would receive no homage, but at once admonished the bewildered and erring apostle, that God, and God alone, was to be worshipped by his creatures. And as the expression of homage was twice offered to him by John, twice does he promptly reply, "See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: *worship God.*"

One instance, indeed, there is on the sacred page, in which a man, a presumptuous, proud, profane, profligate man, *did* receive worship, *did* allow himself to be approached and hailed as God, and seemed to have full complacency in the proffered honor. "On a set day, Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration to them of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to desire peace" at his hands. And as he there, in all the pride of authority and pomp, "made an oration to them, the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." And while he, vain man, uttered no rebuke against the guilty idolatry thus rendered to him, and seemed with a greedy satisfaction to swallow the flattery thus poured into his ears, honoring him with divine worship; the Most High, in his wrath, and in righteous jealousy for his own name, and for the worship due to himself alone, instantly took the case into his own Almighty hand; for "immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, *because he gave not God the glory*; and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost."—The corruption of the grave, and the grave-worm itself, as in a moment, fastening themselves upon him, before the eyes of the multitude, while yet he was robed in royal apparel, and while the acclamations of his gazing worshippers had scarce died upon his ear.

Such is the strong and thrilling testimony of the Bible, that worship can be rendered to none but God, without incurring the rebuke of Heaven. And yet, equally strong and undeniable is the testimony of the Bible, that Jesus Christ is worshipped by all the intelligent and holy in heaven and on earth. What then follows? Can the argument possibly be stronger to demonstrate that *Jesus Christ is God*? It is an argument confirmed by all who truly know him, in all worlds; and it is an argument, which will grow stronger and stronger, every day and every hour, through time and through an endless eternity; for it is corroborated by every act of worship, rendered to him on earth and in heaven.

In this sublime worship, we, my hearers, may have part, not only here, but before his throne in heaven. There, all who now honor the Son, even as they honor the Father, shall, with golden harps, unite in the song of Moses and the Lamb, for ever and ever. Let us, then, now ask ourselves, Are we here worshipping and serving the Saviour, so as to be justified in the hope that we shall see him, and glorify him, and enjoy him, in heaven? Here is the point, which it behooves us all to settle now. And I ask not, simply, whether you admit the reality of his claims to divine worship: but has this doctrine, in its power, reached your heart? Are you worshipping him in spirit and in truth? The time is coming, we know, when there shall be none to gainsay the truth of his Godhead; when it will be so written in the flames

of a burning world, that all shall see it; and when, before his august throne, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess, either in the wailings of despair, or in anthems of joy. In which of these, my dear hearers, shall we have part? Take heed, and be not deceived. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." And "this is the work of God, *that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*"

SERMON CCVIII.

By JAMES M. MATHEWS, D. D.

CRITICAL PERIODS IN THE SINNER'S LIFE.

Luke xix. 42, 44—*This thy day—the time of thy visitation.*

WHEN Cesar stood on the banks of the Rubicon, a stream dividing Gaul from Italy, he paused for a time and deliberated. But at length he exclaimed, "The die is cast;" and throwing himself into the river, he passed it, followed by his army. He felt that in that deed he rendered the Roman senate open foes to him, and himself an open foe to them; and that he thenceforward, having cut off all retreat, had entered on a career which would issue in consigning him to the death of a traitor, or in raising him to be the first man in Rome, then the first city in the world. Such was the influence on his whole future life, which he saw would result from his crossing that river: and hence has the phrase, to "cross the Rubicon," become proverbial for those events in a man's life, which exercise a decisive influence on his future history and character.

A very brief survey of our own lives, and the lives of others, will lead us at once to see, that such events occur in every man's history—events which have a marked and decisive effect on subsequent character and condition. It is so in every man's history, as to his temporal interests. There is some event, or series of events, that determined the profession or occupation he pursues; some event, or series of events, that has decided his measure of success in the pursuit of it: and we do well, my hearers, often to look back and to survey these all-important seasons in our history; as they will often show how kindly and wisely an unseen, but Omnipotent hand, has led us on for good; led us, as he leads the blind, in ways they know not, and in paths they have not known.

But, my hearers, there are Rubicons to be passed in our religious and moral course, as well as in our temporal—occasions in the experience of our hearts, which extend their influence so far into the future, that it mainly depends on the decision we *then* make, and the purposes we *then* form, whether we shall at last be saved or lost for ever. If this be so, how important that

we should know it ; and, if such occasions there are, how important that we should be able to discern and appreciate them ! Let us then,

I. Show the fact that there *are* days, or occasions, in every man's life, on which his eternal interests are mainly suspended. And,

II. Point out what those seasons are, and how they are to be most surely known and distinguished.

Our proof of the first shall be drawn simply from the Scriptures. They tell us of such a day occurring in every man's history, just as plainly as they tell of a coming judgment. How, otherwise, are we to interpret the text ? It speaks of a day, as Jerusalem's day : and why *her* day, if not because on her improvement of it depended, as the Saviour adds, whatever belonged to her peace ? That day is called, *the time of her visitation*," because of the special nearness and favor with which God then manifested himself, for the last time. Such special seasons of divine visitation are indicated in the following passages :—" I said, I will confess my transgression unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin : for this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee *in a time when thou mayest be found*." " Seek ye the Lord, *while he may be found* ; call upon him, *while he is near*." " The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." In every year that passes, there is a season of harvest ; and if the work of harvest is not done, before the season is gone, the labor of the year is lost. So is it in the life of man. There is a harvest season in his days, as they move on ; and if it is not improved, he and all that is valuable to him, is *lost*.

" Yet a *little while* is the light with you ; walk *while* ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you :—*while* ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of the light. These things spake Jesus ; and departed, and did *hide himself* from them." And he hid himself from them as a comment on his words ; in which he had taught them that the period in every man's days, while he may be said to have the light, is comparatively " a little while ;" and that if it passes unimproved, thenceforward, Christ, as it were, hides himself from the man, though still living among those to whom the Saviour is revealed.

" Behold, these three years, I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none ; cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground ? And the dresser of the vineyard answered—Lord, let it alone *this year* also, till I shall dig about it and dung it : and if it bear fruit, well : and if not, *then after that* thou shalt cut it down :"—showing us that when men have long resisted the Spirit, and remained unfruitful, " he limits a certain time," during which he will deal with them still farther ; and if, beyond that limited time, they continue unfruitful and impenitent, " *then, after that*," he abandons them to destruction. As he says in another place, " Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, to-day, after so long a time, as it is said, to-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

Such are some of the proofs which the Scriptures afford that there *are* periods, occasions in the lives of all, on which the interests of eternity are suspended, and hang, as it were, poised and vibrating ; when the choice then

made, and the step then taken, be it for good or evil, sends its spreading and controlling influence over the man through time and into eternity; when all of weal or of wo that awaits him, seems summed up in what he does, and decides on, at that one hour or one moment of his being; and when, though all his future life may contribute to the same result, yet then and there was the turning point of his everlasting destiny.

And now, my beloved hearers, who would not desire to be taught, how he can know and discern, in time, these periods of his moral history, which are so pregnant with good or evil to all his subsequent existence here and hereafter? There is no secrecy about them; no difficulty in knowing and ascertaining them. God desires to make them plain; so that he who runs may read, and reading may understand. Let us consider then, as we proposed,

II. How those seasons may be known; how we can discern their occurrence. They occur,

1. *In times of affliction; especially if it be affliction immediately from the hand of God.* There is something in the rod, especially if held in God's hand, that has a melting tendency on the heart. Whether it be disease inflicted on ourselves, or death bereaving us of those we love; it is designed by Him, who afflicts, as a "time of visitation," as "a day" on which much depends, as to the future condition of the heart. There may be those who harden themselves under the chastisement; and who, like Pharaoh, or like Israel of old, if smitten more, will but harden themselves, and will but sin more and more. And when this is the case with any man, we have reason to fear, his day of visitation is gone by; and that he is now given up, as one "past feeling." Alas for the man, who can feel himself carried near his own grave, or can look into the fresh grave of one dear to him, and yet not melt—and yet not feel that God is speaking to him loudly and earnestly. He may call it firmness; God and his angels call it "hardness and blindness." He may felicitate himself on what he can bear, while all this cherished insensibility is only ripening him for a heavier doom, when his heart will break beneath the curse of Him to whose rod he refused to yield.

But it was not always so with any man; I hope it is not yet so with any one before me. I would hope that if the rod of Heaven fall on any of you, the day of its coming may be the day of your peace with God. To secure this result, watch your own hearts, when suffering under sorrows; and watch them also when the sorrow is gone, lest like a deceitful bow they turn aside, and leave your last state worse than the first. Many, many thousands among the redeemed, are now looking back on days of grief, and saying, "It is good that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word." It was in this way God reclaimed them from their wanderings. And in this way has he brought many to a stand, who, until the hour of their sorrow, were hasting in the downward path to perdition.

And here I would mention one class of transgressors, who are generally reached in this way, if ever the day of saving power overtakes them at all. I mean those sons and daughters of pious parents, who, though instructed in the

way of truth and duty, have yet despised it, and are living in prolonged impenitence and unbelief. Aggravated guilt rests on all such. In infancy, they were commended to God in faith and prayer. In childhood, they were trained for God by parental precept and example. And if, in mature years, they turn aside and walk in the ways of sin, he has but two ways of treating them. He either pronounces the sentence on them, "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone;" and then perhaps pours his abundance around them—their hearts growing hard, as their prosperity is full; or in mercy, refusing to give them up, he sends his rod, his scourge, that by its strokes he may chastise their wanderings, and save them from utter ruin. Thus he reached Manasseh, the son of good Hezekiah; and reclaimed him from his idolatries; though to save his soul he lost his crown, and was sent in chains a prisoner to Babylon. (2 Chron. xxxiii. 11—13.) If any should then tremble to let the day of their affliction pass by unsanctified, it is such as I have now described. Their last hope is gone, if severe chastisement comes, and leaves them still unreclaimed to God.

2. I have time to allude only to one other critical period in the life of the sinner. It is, *when God's word is accompanied with unusual power, either upon those around him, or on his own heart.* God's calls in his gospel are always earnest, and always loud. But there are times when his voice waxes louder and louder, and when the power which accompanies it, rends the rocks asunder, and makes the mountains to tremble and quake. (Exodus xix. 18, 19.) Such a day did the Israelites see when they stood at the foot of Sinai, and listened to the voice of God, as he pronounced to them the words of his law. Such a day did Jerusalem see, when the Son of God was in the midst of her. He then "spake as never man spake." "The people were astonished at his doctrine," and "wondered at the words of truth and grace which proceeded from his lips." A day, too, of still greater power accompanying his word, was seen, when, "Pentecost having come, the apostles were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave utterance;"—"to speak the wonderful works of God," and to speak with such power, that "on the same day, thousands were added to the church of such as should be saved."

Nor are days of special power, accompanying God's word, unknown in later times. Who has not heard of those "seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord," which have been granted of late years, and are granted still, to revive his heritage, when languishing? Yes, and in his infinite and sovereign mercy, *we* have seen them and felt them; seen and felt them in this sanctuary. We have seen the day when the very same truth, which now falls on the ear of many like water on the rock, melted those who heard it into contrition in a moment, and raised the anxious inquiry from old and young, "What must I do to be saved?" And all this was so, because God was then in a special manner here, and accompanied his word with special manifestations of his presence and power.

Whenever and wherever such seasons come, they constitute "*the day*" of those who see them; they are a "*time of visitation*" from God, when he comes in great mercy; when he calls loudly and powerfully upon all to return

to him; and when all that will come are welcomed and saved. And what we admonish all to remember, is, that if their unbelief outlives such seasons of mercy, there is reason to fear it will destroy them for ever. There is most solemn meaning on this point, in the words of the prophet, where he calls "*the acceptable year of the Lord, the day of vengeance of our God.*" For, strange as it may seem, the time of one, is always a time of the other—a day marked as a day of *acceptance with God*, by the freedom and power with which he makes his salvation known, is always marked as a day of *vengeance from God*, by the righteous indignation, wherewith he casts off and leaves to their own hardened unbelief those who still persist in rebellion, in defiance of the loud calls they then hear. How was it in the cases already recited? There were many in the congregation of Israel, who heard the voice of the Lord when he spake from Sinai, and who stood out against it all, and did not believe in him; and the consequence then was, that, because they believed not, God swore that they should not enter into his rest; and they went on grieving his Spirit, till "their carcasses fell in the wilderness." And, as we are taught by our Lord in the text to expect that it should be, equally marked and fatal was the issue to the great mass of those who heard his warning and powerful voice in the days of his flesh, and yet did not believe on him. There were some in the nation, whose eyes were opened, and who embraced him as the Saviour, even after they had aided to crucify him. But from the multitude, from Jerusalem as a city, "the day" was passed, "the time of visitation" was gone. They had refused to hear him, while "dwelling among them full of grace and truth," and "teaching the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." And now, when others saw and believed, "the things which belonged to their peace were hidden from their eyes."

Let us then, my hearers, "beware lest a promise being left us of entering into rest, we should fail, and come short of it, after the same example of unbelief." We have heard the terrors of the law and the grace of the gospel. We have seen, perhaps felt, the trembling and anxiety produced by the one, when revealed in its power; and we have seen, if we have not felt, the grace and sweetness of the other, when those around us have bowed beneath its influence, and believed to life everlasting. And if we have seen others thus taken, while we are still left, then how earnestly and instantly should we be up and doing! Up, up, and do; as if you felt the alternative of heaven or hell to depend on the decision of this hour. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth, say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Perhaps, long as you have delayed, the call may still be for you. "We, then, as workers together with God, beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith, I have heard thee, in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Amen.